

to: juvenile justice, crime, housing, job training, domestic violence, hunger relief, senior services and education.

The bill also contains \$13 billion in tax reductions over the next decade designed to encourage charitable giving. Given the new budgetary constraints after the passage of the President's \$1.35 trillion tax cut package, the Ways and Means Committee approved just 15% of charitable giving tax incentives provided under the President's plan. H.R. 7 would permit taxpayers who do not itemize their taxes to deduct up to \$25 in charitable contributions a year, rising to \$100 in 2010. Under this bill, non-itemizers in the 15 percent tax bracket would get anemic tax benefit of \$3.75 a year if they contributed the maximum, rising to \$15 a year. I would also note that the bill does not provide one additional dollar in federal funding for charitable-choice programs. In fact, the President's budget, in fact, slashes funding for some of the very programs promoted in the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I supported the "charitable choice" provisions of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act which allowed religious organizations to qualify for federal funds for social service programs, without being forced to eliminate or soften their religious content. Such previously-enacted charitable choice laws strictly prohibited these faith-based social-service providers from proselytizing in their federally-funded programs. Today, we have before us legislation to give effect to the President's "faith-based initiative" by allowing religious organizations to proselytize or undertake other religious activity with federal funds when such activities are funded indirectly through vouchers.

This approach, while well-meaning, runs afoul of the First Amendment requirement of separation of church and state and would open the door to employment discrimination in federally-funded programs. Under H.R. 7, groups would be permitted to make hiring decisions based on religion, without regard to state or local laws on the subject. Under the bill, for instance, an organization could discriminate against someone involved in an interracial relationship or second marriage, if that status violated the doctrine of the religion. I can see no legitimate justification for permitting providers of government-funded secular services to discriminate in this manner. The content of a person's heart and a desire to serve the community should be the only requisites for undertaking good works. Taxpayers should not be required to support discrimination.

The fact that some of the most vocal opponents of this bill are members of the clergy must not be overlooked. The bill does not provide adequate safeguards regarding the separation of church and state and may pave the way for excessive entanglement between government and religion. Churches and religious organizations that embrace this program should consider that with taxpayer dollars comes a fiduciary responsibility in the form of oversight and what can be deemed intrusions into the affairs of such churches and other faith-based groups. Just this week, I heard from a constituent, a political science professor from Rice University who is active in his church, who urged me to vote against H.R. 7 and said it would "strike a blow to religious autonomy in America, allowing government auditors and other bureaucrats into the inner sanctum of religious organizations—including,

ironically, many of the churches who favor the bill." I couldn't have said it better myself.

Mr. Speaker, I also oppose the substitute, offered by Reps. RANGEL and CONYERS, because I believe that the passage of new legislation is not necessary. For decades, government-funded partnerships with religiously-affiliated organizations such as Catholic Charities, Jewish Community Federations, and Lutheran Social Services have helped to combat poverty and have provided housing, education, and health care services for those in need. These successful partnerships have provided excellent service to communities largely unburdened by concerns over bureaucratic entanglements between government and religion. In fact, many smaller churches in my district provide a multitude of social services to the community with federal grant money and tax deductible contributions. The existing prohibition on proselytizing has not curtailed their desire to serve and fulfill their missions.

Under the present system, any church or religious institution can establish a 501(C)(3) and apply for federal funds. Under §501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, "charitable organizations" set up by organizations such as the Red Cross, Catholic Charities USA or small churches and religious organizations greatly benefit from the ability to receive tax-deductible charitable contributions and are generally exempted from being taxed. Today, religiously-affiliated private entities receive hundreds of millions of dollars for their social service works. Mr. Speaker, we must all remember that religious institutions are out there, every day, making a difference in the lives of their communities and, with or without passage of this measure, will continue to contribute to the social fabric of this nation.

Mr. Speaker, while I strongly believe that religious organizations play an important role in providing needed social-welfare programs, I cannot sanction this bill which would put the federal government in the position of funding discrimination picking and choosing among the right religions and breaking down the separation of church and state.

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition of H.R. 7, the Community Solutions Act. With 12 million children living in poverty, it is clear that Congress needs to do more to lift them out of their desperate situation. However, H.R. 7 does nothing to achieve this goal. It provides only a minimal tax deduction to encourage people to contribute to charitable organizations that provide social services to the poor. The bill does not provide any new government funding for faith-based organizations to carry out their missions to provide social services and reduce poverty.

If the Republicans truly cared about lifting children and families out of poverty, their budget would reflect significant increases in funding for social service programs. Instead, the Bush budget increases spending for the Administration for Children and Families by only 2.9%—far less than even inflation.

This bill is purported to be necessary to allow religious organizations to receive federal funds to provide services for those in need. In fact, many religious organizations qualify for such funds today. The only requirement is that they separate their duties as religious entities from their social service programs. For example, Catholic Charities received \$1.4 billion in 1999 in government funding—totaling two-thirds of their annual budget.

Let's be real. This bill has nothing to do with increasing social services funding.

The most significant achievement of H.R. 7 is to allow federally funded faith-based organizations to circumvent state and local anti-discrimination laws.

Last week, the Bush administration announced that they would not pursue an administrative rule that would allow faith-based organizations to pre-exempt state laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. Although some may believe that action resolved the issue, it did not. H.R. 7 explicitly allows faith-based organizations to pre-empt state law and state law and discriminate in their hiring practices.

This provision is worse than the Administration's proposed regulation because it allows faith-based organizations to not only discriminate against someone based on their sexual orientation, but for many other reasons such as being unmarried or pregnant to name a couple. However, this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Religious organizations have an exemption under the Civil Rights Act that allows them to discriminate in the hiring of individuals that perform their religious work. However, that exemption does not currently allow them to discriminate in the hiring of individuals that carry out their federally funded social service programs. H.R. 7 extends the Civil Rights exemption to allow faith-based organizations to discriminate in the hiring of individuals that deliver their federally funded social service programs.

Again, the only real change in this bill from current law is to allow faith-based organizations to discriminate and to proselytize while receiving government funds. This bill is strong on promoting discrimination and weak on lifting families out of poverty.

By passing H.R. 7, the United States House of Representatives is sending the message that Congress endorses government-sponsored discrimination. I believe that this message desecrates the memory of the men, women and children who lost and risked their lives to bring equal rights to all who live in this country. Instead of undermining the memory of these courageous civil rights advocates, Congress should be using their effort as a source of inspiration to continue and move forward the battle to ensure that all who live in this nation obtain true equal rights.

It is time that our nations' leaders stood together to protect the advancements made in civil rights and create a nation that cherishes tolerance for all groups. To truly help the poor, Congress should ensure that they have access to health care, child care and other social services. None of these measures require undermining this nation's civil rights laws.

Finally, I hope this bill is no indication that Bush Administration wants to dismantle our existing social safety net and turn it over to religious organizations and other private charities. A recent Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation study indicates that charities—even with the benefits of the tax cuts in this bill—would not be able to replace the federal government's commitment to providing social services. According to their study, adding up the current assets of all the foundations in America would only replace federal government funding for social services for 74 days. The Bush Administration may want to shift responsibility to religious organizations and private charities, but they can't do the job alone.